

## 3. WILD DOGS

Mr. E. R. C. Davidar's interesting note on village dogs joining wild dogs in the hunt in the *Journal* (Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 146-8) prompts me to send in this account of an exceptionally close view I had of wild dogs hunting chital in the Masinagudi area of the Mudumalai Sanctuary. This area has long been noted for its chital, which are really big and go about in large herds unlike the chital of the rest of the sanctuary. In recent years, the deer have multiplied here, the opening up of the country around Masinagudi and the Moyar project both being favourable to them, and wild dogs are the main natural check.

Early in October 1963, at about sunset, I noticed a pack of wild dogs hemming in a herd of chital stags on a rise to the east of the eucalyptus plantation in Masinagudi—large stag parties, consisting of animals in hard horn, in velvet, and with polled heads are not uncommon here at this time of the year. The deer were about half a mile away and, above me, between me and them, was a deep hollow with sloping sides. The light was already yellow, but I thought that if I got down to the hollow I might get a picture of the chase, if the deer fled down the sunlit slope on their side. However, by the time I reached the hollow they had already crossed the dip and were galloping towards the plantation, up the slope on my side. Nowadays I find hillsides literally breath-taking but I ran up, hoping to get a clear view from the top, and almost collided with a chital stag in velvet that was bounding down the slope, closely followed by two wild dogs.

One of these was normally coloured and the other, nearer me and only some 10 feet away, was coloured rather like a jackal. I had a clear view of this animal and thought it an exceptionally coloured wild dog; it is hard to be sure of details, or even size, when an animal is running low to ground, as hunting wild dogs (and jackals!) do, but I am quite sure this was no jackal; its ears were rounded and its muzzle deep, and the coloration of its neck and limbs almost chestnut. The deer was distinctly the gainer by my chance intervention, and got away. A few days later, meeting Mr. Davidar in Ootacamund, I told him of what I had seen, and he informed me that there was a report of grizzle-and-black-backed, jackal-like wild dogs in an earlier volume of the *Journal* [Vol. 51 (2): 495-7 (?)—Eds.]. As I wished to scrutinise the wild dogs of this area closer before committing myself to anything, I did not write a note on this, but it did strike me as curious that wild dogs, which have such a wide distribution in Asia and which are, considering all things, so uniformly coloured, should sport a variety in this area alone. I now wonder if the animal I saw could have been a village dog, built remarkably like a wild dog.

Dogs are said to be evolved mainly from jackals and wolves, with the

wild dog (which looks so dog-like) contributing nothing to their evolution—this distinction is made on the basis of anatomy, notably of the dentition, and wild dogs have been assigned a genus apart from dogs, wolves, and jackals. I do not think any interbreeding is possible. White markings, even outside the tail-tip, are not unknown in wild dogs.

To continue with my blundering adventure: after this interruption I persisted with my panting climb and, as I topped the rise, so did the main body of the hunt, 8 wild dogs chasing a chital stag that had just shed its antlers—the nearest dog pulled up just in time to avoid colliding with me and stopped momentarily only a yard away. The stag was spent, but going towards the plantation in great bounds; it was prevented from entering the tree cover by two wild dogs beyond it. As I watched from only 20 yards away, one of the wild dogs on my side ran in for the kill. This run, which I have seen once before, is quite different from the efficient gallop of wild dogs chasing their quarry. It is a mad scurry, with the body so low to ground that the frantic legs seem to kick out sideways at a furious speed, to carry the sprinting hunter to the quarry; the jaws are open in a snarl, and the quick, rasping gasps of the wild dog are clearly audible. A line of bushes saved the deer from this wild dog, but as it dropped back, another instantly took up the run for the bite. The deer was pulled down about half a furlong away from me, but I had a reasonably clear view of the killing, and noticed once again that it is not merely the jaw-power of the wild dog (which is considerable) but also the forward momentum of the much heavier quarry that is responsible for large lumps of flesh from the neck or flanks, or an entire cheek, coming away in the jaws of the hunter at one bite.

Although photography was now out of the question, I approached the kill furtively, climbing a pile of boulders to get above it. The dogs were busy tearing at the neck and forequarters, which had already been stripped to the bone; the tail had been bitten off at the base and thrown to one side, and the paunch and much of the intestines removed and flung a few yards away (I noticed both these things in the only other kill I have seen, a sambar hind)—all this within 8 minutes!

The dogs were busy tugging furiously at the flesh and leaping back to detach it, hide and all; 5 of them were feeding, and 3 stood around panting. In spite of their preoccupation, one of the wild dogs saw me on the boulders, and drew away with a gruff, brief bark, exactly like the interrogatory bark of a large domestic dog not sure of an intruder on its territory. The other dogs looked up, and some of them also indulged in the interrogatory bark; then they slunk away. I retreated at once, realizing, belatedly, that it was a very wrong thing I had done, intruding on feeding wild dogs in a sanctuary. By now the light was failing rapidly but, when I had gone about a hundred yards away, the wild dogs reassembled with almost hyena-like calls and returned to their kill. I

have never before heard either this somewhat fiendish reassembly call or the interrogatory bark, nor have I heard of them.

Incidentally, perhaps the most notable thing about wild dogs in this area is that, though there are any number of cattle grazing in the jungles, they kill only wild animals. Has this peculiar bias of wild dogs, unshared by most other predators, received the study and consideration it merits?

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[A photograph of a wild dog mother with her jackal-hybrid pups born in captivity is published on page 198 of Vol. 35 of the *Journal*. This is referred to in Lt.-Col. R. W. Burton's well-documented and informative paper on the Indian Wild Dog on page 691 of Vol. 41 of the *Journal* in which he deals with other points raised by Mr. Krishnan. In particular, Lt.-Col. Burton speaks of the 'hyena-like' chattering of the wild dog when startled or alarmed or at the time of disputing a tiger or panther kill. According to him attacks on domestic stock are unusual; he refers to reports of some, in addition to which we have before us one that comes from Chikmagalur District, Mysore State (*Journal* Vol. 50: 162-3).—Eds.]

#### 4. OCCURRENCE OF THE NORTHERN PALM SQUIRREL, *FUNAMBULUS PENNANTI* WROUGHTON, IN THE ANDAMANS

While working on the collections of mammals from the Andaman Islands made by the Zoological Survey of India in recent years, I have come across a specimen of the Northern Palm Squirrel, *Funambulus pennanti* Wroughton, which, according to authoritative literature (Miller 1902; Ellerman & Morrison-Scott 1951; Ellerman 1961) is not expected to occur there.

The specimen in question is an adult female taken by the Z.S.I. party at Brooksabad, Port Blair, on 24 March 1952. Its external measurements (in mm.) are: head and body 142, tail 147, hindfoot 37, ear 18. It is a study skin without skull and bears the Z.S.I. Regd. No. 12132. In external characters, it does not differ from the population of the mainland of India.